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ABSTRACT

The two subjects of this paper are: (1) the development of the training consortia concept, and (2) the process employed during three visits to evaluate each of three training consortia now in operation. The training consortia have as their goal the training of personnel to work as members of collaborative teams in the areas of educational development, diffusion, and evaluation. A copy of the original Request for Proposal is provided and referred to throughout the paper. It is concluded that a systematic strategy for evaluating RDD and E training programs has not yet been installed. (DB)

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Symposium: Do We Practice What We Preach? Are Systematic Research, Development, Diffusion, and Evaluation Being Used in Establishing RDD&E Training Programs?

Presentation: The Evaluation of Educational RDD&E Training Programs, by John E. Hopkins.

In this paper I will comment on two matters: (1) the development in reality of the training consortia concept, which is one segment of the activities being supported by the Research Training Program of the National Center for Educational Research and Development, U.S. Office of Education, and (2) the process employed during three visits to evaluate each of the training consortia now in operation. I was a member of each of the three evaluation teams which site visited these projects in late October and early November, 1971. My comments in this area are based entirely on my own observations as a member of these site visit teams and have no substantiation beyond that.

Perhaps it is needless to say that I will not comment on the worth or value of any of the three projects individually, for reasons which are obvious. Neither will I comment on the progress of the three projects generally, for reasons which I shall itemize later. To repeat, the focus of this paper is on the actualization of the concept, and, secondly, the process employed to evaluate the new RDD&E training consortia.

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Actualization of the Training Consortia Concept

In March, 1970, the Research Training Program issued a Request for Proposals (RFP 70-12) to design new patterns for training educational RDD&E personnel. Twelve groups were funded to conduct design studies during the six-month period June to December, 1970. In January, 1971, three of the twelve were funded to conduct a three-year operational test of their designs. Upon evidence being obtained of their effectiveness, federal support of their activities was to be continued, being phased

out gradually over an additional seven year period. Thus, a federal commitment (to the extent federal agencies are able to make a "commitment") was contemplated for a full ten year period, assuming successful completion of the initial three-year operational test phase. The training consortia at Ohio State, under the direction of Dan Stufflebeam, at LRDC in Pittsburgh, under Glen Heathers and John Yeager, and at the Far West Laboratory for Educational Research and Development, under Paul Hood and Joe Ward, recently completed the first year of that three-year operational test phase.

At this point I want to give you some background as to what these consortia were intended to be. On the first page of the supplementary materials which were made available to you, you will see a listing of three general objectives which appeared in the original description of the training consortia concept (RFP 70-12). Below the general objectives are eight specific objectives which relate to the first two general objectives. As you look over those general and specific objectives, I believe you will get the picture of a group of training structures which were rich in human and financial resources; powerful enough to create new and imaginative approaches to a kind of training that is not very widely offered in the United States today, that is, the training of personnel to work as members of collaborative teams in the areas of educational development, diffusion, and evaluation; structures which would produce field-oriented people to work on the basic and important problems which confront public and private schools at all levels--today and tommorrow.

This concept is not now receiving a true test. Under the funding conditions imposed upon the training consortia by the Research Training Program, and the budgetary restraints imposed on the Research Training Program by Congress, the training consortia are a long, long way from the resource-rich environment in which creative change flourishes, and which, in turn, helps to make organizational change possible. Because of the lack of funds, the three training consortia are receiving between half to two-thirds of the funds originally thought necessary to implement the concept.

Under these circumstances, the training consortia are struggling in the directions laid out in the objectives, but can hardly be said to be moving with strength or power. Under present funding restrictions, there is no possibility of their exploring multiple alternatives to known methods of training. With funds as tight as they are, the consortia will not be able to do as much developmental work as had been hoped, and it appears unlikely that they will be able to develop the cost-accounting and phenomenological data bases which were considered necessary for evaluating the relative effectiveness and efficiency of their individual operations.

From an outsider's point of view, at least, it seems that, should their present anemic condition continue, the products of the three existing consortia can only be pale shadows of the robust forces for change and improvement which were originally envisioned. However, there is still ample opportunity for these fledgling units to grow into the roles expected of them. I would strongly recommend that consideration be given to transfusing additional funds into at least some of the consortia -- so they have a real chance to prove themselves. I would not be optimistic about what they could prove, or we could learn, if the present situation were to continue without substantial change.

In this symposium we are looking at the question of whether we are practicing what we preach. I submit that the way of research is to develop and assess the critical test, not simply to carry on as best you can under the circumstances. If we were to apply the principles of research to this matter, then, I believe we would do that which was necessary to secure a full test of the concept. By so behaving, it is at least possible that we could learn some things which would help us to chart our goals and means for the future.

Process Employed to Evaluate the Training Consortia

Each of the three evaluation teams carried out what I believe was a quite conventional site visit. By that I mean that each member of each team received

the materials carefully. Each of the visits to the site was occupied principally by a day to day-and-one-half re-examination and/or elaboration of these same materials by members of the project staff. Some time was devoted in each visit to short interviews of staff and trainees by the site visitors. On the basis of essentially impressionistic data, the members of the visiting team then formed preliminary individual judgments about the project generally and/or about specific components of the project. These judgments were subsequently pooled and modified through discussion among members of the evaluation team. Finally, a consensus set of conclusions was developed and delivered to the project staff.

The results of the three visits are informative. At one of the sites, the evaluation team, in effect, quarreled with the project staff with respect to the objectives which they had developed and operationalized for their local training effort. The members of the visiting team reached the consensus conclusion that there were more desirable sets of objectives toward which the consortium could be working. The result of this visit was that the project staff was required to recast their program substantially.

At a second site, the evaluation team questioned the means being developed by the project staff to meet their objectives -- which, in this case, the evaluation team approved. The result of the visit was that the project staff was required to reformulate the means being developed to provide the training being offered in their particular program.

At the third site, the evaluation team had no argument with either the objectives or the means proposed by the project staff, and so neither recasting nor reformulation were required of these trainers. The evaluation team ended this visit by offering a pat on the back and commendation for a job well done.

At all three sites the members of the visiting teams were business-like, hard working, alert, sensitive, forthright, and courteous. That is to say, in terms of a conventional site visit, I suspect most participants believed we had acted as a good and effective evaluation team.

Before I comment further on the evaluation process used, I think it only fair to provide you a number of reasons why this fairly conventional approach to evaluation team was developed and used, the main reason being, as you will see, that it would have been extremely difficult to mount and conduct any other kind of evaluation.

1. The evaluation teams were visiting the three training consortia very early in their organizational lives. This was the first annual visit during a three-year operational test phase for projects which have the potential to continue under federal funding for up to ten years.

2. The major emphasis of the training staffs during this first year was on the organizational and operational, rather than the evaluative. Their first responsibility was to organize themselves, recruit and select a staff and class of trainees, and begin offering a training program within 4-7 months.

3. The operational test phase was explicity stated to be a developmental period, during which experimentation and flexibility were encouraged. The situation at each location therefore remains fluid, which tends to inhibit the development of data-gathering and analysis procedures, instruments, and techniques.

4. Since all of the projects are seriously underfunded, the resources at their command are strained simply to cover the essentials necessary to offer a program of training.

5. All of the consortia had heavy reporting requirements during the year, which imposed a further drain on their already-slim human resources.

6. None of the programs had any "graduates," so it would not have been possible to make any assessment of the products of the programs -- even if any of them had spelled out the long-term competencies they were trying to impart, which none of them had.

All of the above are reasons why the site visit teams adopted the evaluation mode actually used. Operational realities seemed to compel use of the conventional site visit approach. I don't wish to say the first evaluations should not have been carried out in that manner. I do wish to say that it would be distinctly undesirable for the annual evaluations to continue in this mode. Continuation of the conventional site visit approach over the long term would be both inappropriate and damaging to the training consortia program. "Inappropriate" because the conventional site visit is not suited to the type of performance-based program which is specified for the consortia. A performance-based program should not be evaluated

on the basis of impressionistic data. "Damaging" because the project staffs will be unable to progress if they continue for any length of time in a situation where even fundamentals may be called up for question, e.g., fundamentals such as the objectives of the project or the means developed to achieve them.

If you will refer again to the supplementary materials, at the top of page 2 (Section A) you will find the evaluation plan contained in the original RFP. Note, especially, that evaluations of the consortia were to be conducted ". . . on the basis of short- and long-term performance and program criteria specified by the training staff of the consortium and agreed to by the Research Training Program." Elsewhere in the RFP it is explained that "short-term" refers to the development of specified skills, behaviors, and understandings, while "long-term" refers to such matters as the placement and subsequent productivity of graduates, program objectives to be accomplished, and so forth. Originally it was anticipated that each consortium would develop and maintain a data-gathering mechanism which would periodically provide data in these areas, for administrative, instructional, and evaluational purposes.

During the October - November site visits, none of the consortia was able to provide either short- or long-term performance and program criteria -- approved or unapproved by the staff of the Research Training Program. No data were yet developed on the progress or productivity of the trainees. Consequently we looked as broadly as we wished, ending up with the objectives in one project and the means in another.

Had the consortia been able to develop performance and program criteria and gotten them approved by the staff of the Research Training Program, there would have been two beneficial results. First, the RTP staff would have seen in performance terms the implications of operationalizing given sets of objectives, and would have been able to negotiate at the outset a mutually acceptable set of objectives. The project staff would then have had a firm, approved base from which to proceed. Second, the matter of means would have been removed from site visit consideration,

because, as in performance contracting anywhere, the contractor would have been freed to use whatever honorable means he chose to produce the results he promised -- within the funds granted, of course.

On the third project we commended the project staff, but we still don't know whether the program they are developing is going to be effective, or efficient, or viable in dollar terms in preparing the kind of people they are trying to produce. Until the data-gathering mechanisms and procedures originally called for are developed, there will be no way available to make these judgments.

Obviously I believe that the process of evaluation conducted with the consortia should be of the type outlined originally. If you will refer to your supplementary materials one final time, Section B, which begins on page 2 and continues through pages 3 and 4, contains the areas examined when the twelve design proposals were being evaluated. The categories of (1) students, (2) faculty, (3) programs, (4) participating institutions and agencies, (5) evaluation capability, (6) administration, and (7) projected output in relation to cost appear to me to have utility for evaluation of the consortia, as well. The sub-items under each category heading offer a minimal structure for developing the performance and program criteria specified in the original RFP.

In conclusion, the only answer I can provide to the second question posed in the title of this symposium is: "No, a systematic strategy has not yet been installed for evaluating RDDE training programs." An evaluation strategy exists, I think. Operational realities have so far prevented the conceptual niceties from being implemented, but I believe there is a possibility that the needed summary quantitative data may, indeed, be available for examination a year or two from now. I also believe that if this is going to be the case, it will be necessary for the project directors and the staff of the Research Training Program to install the development of performance and program criteria as a primary work objective for the coming year. Possibly then we will be able to report that we do practice what we preach, because we evaluate in terms of previously specified and mutually agreeable performance and program criteria.

Request for Proposals (No. 70-12) to Design New Patterns for Training Research, Development, Demonstration/Dissemination, and Evaluation Personnel in Education

Overall or General Objectives

1. Secure greater balance in the type of persons being trained by developing training programs which focus on educational D,D, & E to complement the existing training programs in educational research.

2. Produce persons trained to work collaboratively with professional, technical, and para-professional associates, to balance the number of solitary, part-time investigators being produced by existing training programs.

3. Provide on-the-job training and/or retraining.

Specific Objectives Relating to General Objectives 1 and 2

1. Secure tested patterns for training persons to engage in collaborative endeavor, as members of R&D teams.

2. Encourage (a) experimentation with apprenticeship/internship arrangements, and (b) course content development activity.

3. Produce new knowledge about training, and possibly influence favorably the training models now commonly in use.

4. Stimulate challenges to current assumptions about training so as to encourage fundamental reconceptualization.

5. Involve user institutions in training in order to enhance the possibility of new approaches to training being developed.

6. Mass resources, rather than spread them, to secure synergistic benefits such as (a) the building of a "critical mass" of conceptual talent, (b) opportunities for specialization among the participating trainers, (c) development of a power base of sufficient strength to effect changes in established institutional requirements and procedures, and (d) certain economies of scale.

7. Promote greater understanding among trainees of the contributions made by the various specializations.

8. Secure better qualitative and greater quantitative input from the disciplines and professions related to education.

A. Evaluation of the Test Phase (Operation) -- p. 23, RFP 70-12

The training programs will be evaluated annually for three years on the basis of short- and long-term performance and program criteria specified by the training staff of the consortium and agreed to by the RTP. Each consortium will be expected to develop and maintain a mechanism for securing periodic data on the progress and productivity of its trainees and "graduates." The evaluation will be conducted by a team of 2-3 on site visitors who will report their observations and conclusions to the RTP. A judgment as to the viability and relative success of the training patterns will be made toward the close or at the end of the third year of operation.

B. Evaluation of Contractual Effort -- pp. 20-3, RFP 70-12

The design for training consortia will be evaluated on the basis of the quality, adequacy, innovativeness, and/or feasibility of the proposals made with respect to (1) students, (2) faculty, (3) program, (4) participating institutions and agencies, (5) evaluation, (6) administration, and (7) projected output (of personnel and materials) in relation to overall costs. Specifically, the evaluation will focus upon such factors as:

(1) Students

a. Plan for recruitment over a national or broad geographic region; from minority groups,; from related disciplines and professions.

b. Procedure for assessing level of student talent and other student characteristics; criteria to be used for acceptance into the program.

c. Plan for assessing student knowledge, diagnosing student's needs in relation to his personal objectives and the program's objectives, and determining progress periodically.

d. Procedure for assuring student participation with faculty and students of other training programs in important investigations and/or problem-solving projects and programs.

e. Plan for actively aiding trainees to find employment where they can use their newly-acquired skills once they have completed the program.

(2) Faculty specifically attached to the training program

a. Participation of faculty of superior quality on a full-time or near full-time basis.

b. Current or recent involvement of faculty in research, development, demonstration/dissemination, or evaluation programs or projects.

c. Procedure for regular faculty consideration of the status, progress, and objective of the training/development being carried out, and provision for systematic efforts by the faculty to improve them.

d. Contribution to the training program by faculty from related disciplines and professional fields.

(3) Program

a. Objectives coincide with or are responsive to needs identified by extant manpower studies and/or stated national priorities.

b. Training is directed toward solution of significant problems in American education generally.

c. Content has been organized, developed, or tailored to meet the needs of the trainees, i.e., is more than the regular on-going program of the institution(s).

d. Abundant apprenticeship opportunities are provided.

e. Consideration has been given to modifying standard instructional modes, patterns, time periods, content, and locations for the purpose of increasing the effectiveness and efficiency of the training offered; imaginative manipulation of these elements is desired.

f. Needed facilities are available for use.

g. Abundant research, development, demonstration/dissemination, and/or evaluation projects and programs are being carried out nearby and are open to observation and participation.

h. Consideration has been given to providing a supervised internship in settings where the trainee might reasonably expect to be employed upon completion of his training program.

i. Students in similar or previous programs offered by the constituent units completed the entire training program and, where offered, the appropriate degree program.

j. Provision for interaction between trainees working on different problem areas, functions, or levels of competency.

k. Willingness and ability to mount and carry out course content and/or instructional materials development activities is demonstrated.

l. Program is sufficiently rationalized to be adapted to a different but similar set of institutions and agencies.

(4) Participating institutions and agencies

a. Adequacy of the physical and financial resources for training which are available.

b. Evidence of ability to attract and retain faculty and students of high quality.

c. Ability of training faculty to conceptualize and put into operation new training programs for new education roles.

d. Evidence of efforts to innovate or substantially improve education.

e. Existence of other training programs of superior quality.

f. Evidence of ability to secure projects and programs to serve as apprenticeship sites for trainees.

(5) Evaluation

a. Objectives specified for both the short-term (i.e., experiences and performance of skills) and long-term (i.e., placement and productivity of "graduates").

b. Plan for monitoring training to secure periodic feedback on progress while training is in process; procedures for feeding monitoring data into the decision-making process.

c. Plan for regular reporting of summary quantitative data on the characteristics, progress, and placement of trainees.

d. Procedures for securing cost data in relation to products of the programs being offered.

(6) Administration

a. Identity of the director of the consortium.

b. Prime responsibility for operation of the consortium designated.

c. Plan for operation of the consortium on the basis of continuous data input from evaluation component.

d. Plan for periodic conceptual and design inputs from sources external to the consortium.

(7) Projected output in relation to costs

a. Projection of number and type of trainees.

b. Capacity for expanding the training offered.

c. Production of new course content or instructional aids in tested, generalizable form.

d. Plan for a cost accounting system which will provide accurate summary data on experimental programs and activities.